



STATE OF HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Brucellosis: Frequently Asked Questions

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by *Brucella* bacteria. These bacteria are primarily passed among animals, including livestock, wild game and even dogs but can also affect humans.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis?

Brucellosis has an incubation period of five to 60 days.

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Sweats
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Physical weakness

Severe infections of the central nervous systems or lining of the heart may occur. Brucellosis can also cause long-lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurrent fevers, joint pain, and fatigue.

Why is there concern about brucellosis being used as a bioweapon?

Brucellosis is found in many parts of the world and is easily transmitted by aerosol. Its potential as an airborne biological weapon was demonstrated in the mid-1940s when the U.S. conducted testing of bombs containing *Brucella* bacteria on animal targets.

How is naturally occurring brucellosis spread?

Humans can become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal products that are contaminated with the *Brucella* bacteria. Humans may contract brucellosis by consuming non-pasteurized milk products of infected animals, inhaling the bacteria or having it enter the body through skin wounds when handling infected animals.

Direct person-to-person spread of brucellosis is extremely rare.

- Mothers who are breast-feeding may transmit the infection to their infants.
- Sexual transmission has also been reported.

How is brucellosis treated?

Blood tests can determine if a patient has brucellosis. Doctors can prescribe effective antibiotics to treat the disease. Depending on the timing of treatment and severity of illness, recovery may take a few weeks to several months.

What should you do if you were exposed to brucellosis?

Immediately seek medical attention. Tell your health care provider of the possible exposure. Brucellosis is generally not fatal. Antibiotic treatment can lessen the severity of the disease. The Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is a national supply of antibiotics and medical/surgical items that can be rapidly sent to the site of a public health emergency. These medicines would be distributed to those in need free of charge.

How common is brucellosis and where is it found?

Brucellosis is not very common in the United States, where only 100 to 200 cases occur each year. Brucellosis can be very common in countries where animal disease control programs have not been implemented or maintained properly. Areas currently listed as high risk are the Mediterranean Basin, South and Central America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

Can my pets get brucellosis?

Yes, dogs can contract and transmit brucellosis. If you think your pet has been infected call your veterinarian. People with immune system deficiencies should not handle dogs known to be infected with brucellosis.